

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

1. (original) Process for reducing the level of harmful substances in tobacco leaves, comprising the following steps:
 - steeping the said leaves in a water bath at a temperature of between 13°C and 25°C for between 4 and 12 hours,
 - cooling the said leaves to a temperature not higher than -35°C, and
 - gradually heating the said leaves at an average rate of not more than 2.0°C/h up to a temperature of at least 35°C.
2. (original) Process according to Claim 1, in which the said leaves are steeped in a water bath at a temperature of between 14°C and 16°C for between 6 and 10 hours.
3. (currently amended) Process according to Claim 1 ~~any one of the preceding claims~~, in which the said leaves are cooled to a temperature of between -35°C and -40°C.
4. (currently amended) Process according to Claim 1 ~~any one of the preceding claims~~, in which the said leaves are heated at an average rate of between 1.5 and 1.8°C/h.